

## ★ Values

- Determination to Change His Life
- Ability to Let Go of the Past
- Desire to Give Back
- Social Emotional Learning

## ★ Reflection Questions

Why was learning to read so important to Will? How did it change his life? What aspirations do you have? How could you use them to do good in the world?

Do you know people like Will who have reached rock-bottom? What are their options?

Do you know how to defend yourself with words, instead of using violence? Tell us how.

Will's life experience inspired him to become a lawyer. What would you like to become?

What kind of relationship do you have with your brother? Could it be better?

## ★ Lessons Learned

Imagine what kind of a world it would be if each of us reached out to one other person.

Helping someone learn how to read can be the first step towards creating their new life.

Aim to be the right person at the right time, doing the right thing.

We can each become a leader, when we turn our lives around and start helping others.

# A Man With a Past Gives Back

Will Morales, Urban Edge  
Boston, MA

When Will Morales was only 14 years old, he was already a leader of an infamous gang, in prison for dealing drugs. It took his brother's death for him to realize he had reached rock bottom. After a lifer taught him how to read, he decided he wanted to help others -- young-people like himself -with brains .and high aspirations -- .to stay out of trouble. Now a 27-year old law student, home owner and. founder of Boston's Urban Edge's Youth Police Partnership, Will shows kids how to defend themselves with words, not fists, knives and guns. "I still carry a gun," Will tells them, "But it's a mental gun-and what I'm shooting for now is the sky --the hope, peace and freedom in the sky!"

## ★ Language Arts: SEL & Diversity

Read Jim's Big Secret (p. 338). Have students write about what reading means to them. Research how many 14-year-olds are in jail. How many of them don't know how to read? Write a report on how not knowing how to read can limit a person's options. Hold a mock trial (with a young person like Will at 14 to experience court procedures. Invite a parole officer to share his experience of teens who have turned their lives around.

## ★ Career Development

Create opportunities for young people to get to know the police in your community as real people whose mission is to serve and protect. Invite them to speak to students - about how they decided to join the police force. Plan to visit your local police station. Invite a lawyer to share his experience of going to law school and discuss his work today

## ★ Community Service: Service Learning

Write to young people in jail and send this story along with your good wishes. Organize opportunities for students to tutor or volunteer in a literacy program. Learn how you can bring the youth and police in your community together to build healthy relationships and teach children how to prevent violence through problem-solving and recreational activities. Research Urban Edge's Youth Police Partnership at [www.urbanedge.org](http://www.urbanedge.org) Identify companies in your community that provide employees with "release time" for community-based volunteer projects. Invite them to volunteer in your school.